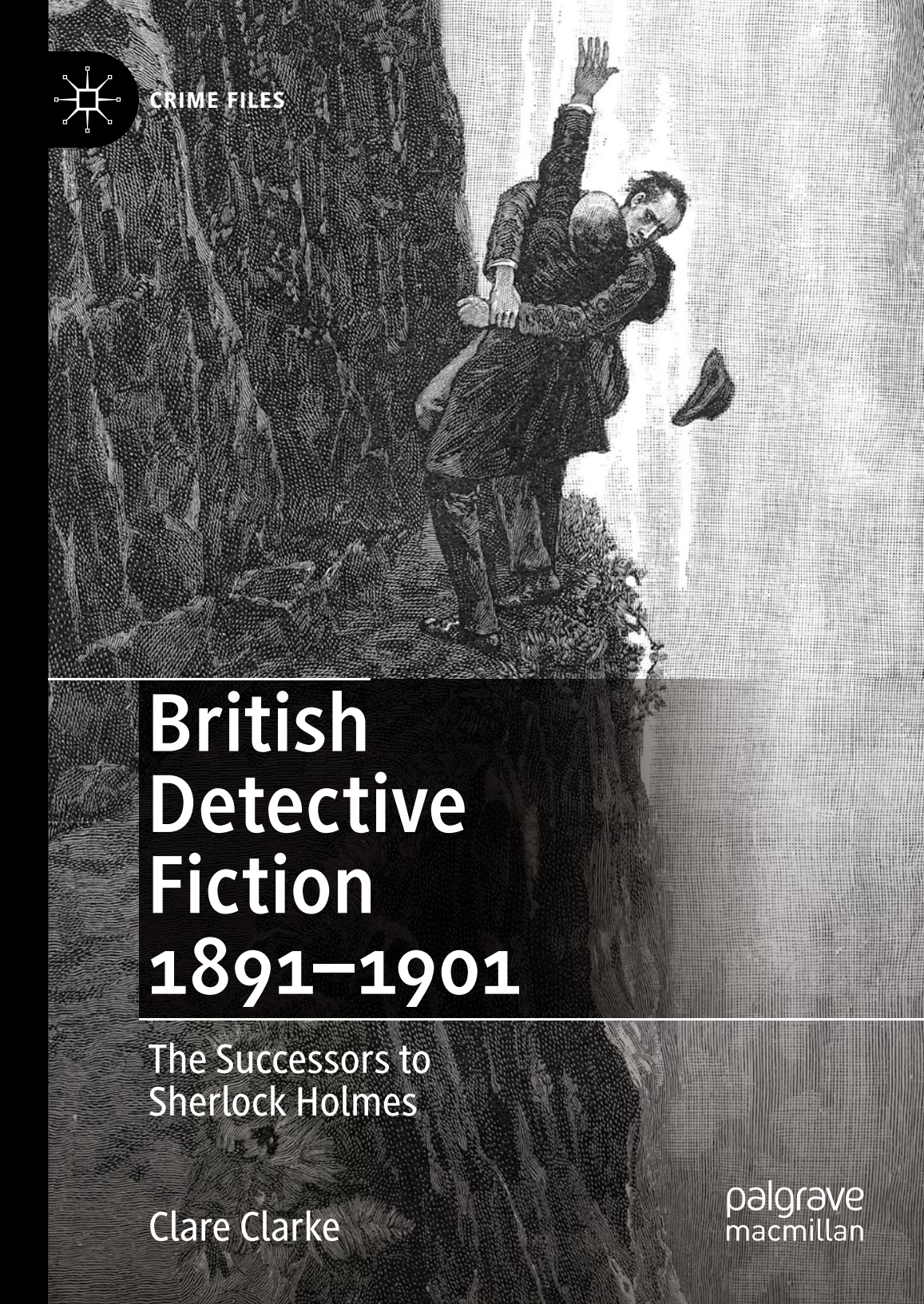

British Detective Fiction 1891–1901

The Successors to Sherlock Holmes

Clare Clarke

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Clare Clarke
School of English
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Contents

1 Introduction: The Successors to Sherlock Holmes 1

2 Detectives Doctor Clifford Halifax and Norman Head, by L.T. Meade 15

3 Detective Loveday Brooke, by C.L. Pirkis 39

4 Detectives Martin Hewitt and Horace Dorrington, by Arthur Morrison 63

5 Detective Hagar Stanley, by Fergus Hume 85

6 Detective the Honourable Augustus Champnell, by Richard Marsh 109

7 Detective Flaxman Low, by Kate Prichard and Hesketh Vernon Hesketh-Prichard 133

8 Conclusion 155

Index 163

About the Author

Clare Clarke is Assistant Professor of Nineteenth-Century Literature and Co-Director of the MPhil in Popular Literature at the School of English, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland. She has published widely on crime and detective fiction. Her first book, *Late-Victorian Crime Fiction in the Shadows of Sherlock* (Palgrave, 2014), was awarded the H.R.F. Keating Prize in 2015.

List of Figures

Fig. 1.1 "The Death of Sherlock Holmes" by Sidney Paget. From "The Final Problem," by Arthur Conan Doyle. *Strand Magazine* Dec. 1893, p. 558. (Image credit: Granger Historical Picture Archive/Alamy Stock Photo) xii

Fig. 2.1 "Hands up, or I fire" by Sidney Paget. From "The Doom," by L. T. Meade and Robert Eustace. *Strand Magazine* Oct. 1898, p. 429 14

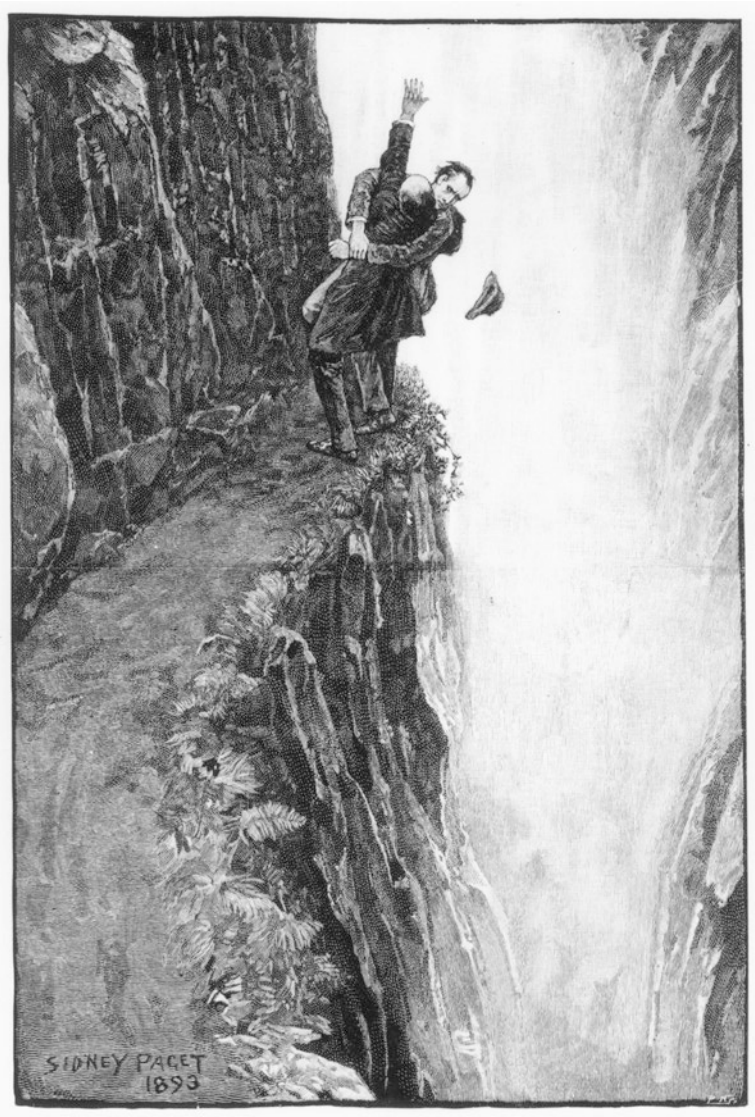
Fig. 3.1 "He Introduced Himself" by Bernard Higham. From "The Redhill Sisterhood," by C.L. Pirkis. *Ludgate Monthly* Vol. 4, April 1893, p. 582. (Image credit: Vintage Book Collection/ Alamy Stock Photo) 38

Fig. 4.1 "So much for that!" by Stanley L. Wood. From "The Avalanche Bicycle and Tyre Co. Ltd," by Arthur Morrison. *Windsor Magazine* Dec. 1897, p. 593 62

Fig. 5.1 "The Female Sherlock Holmes. Hagar of the Pawnshop. Adventure No. 1—The First Customer and the Florentine Dante." *The Evening World* (New York) 25 July 1906, p. 8. (Public domain image accessed at *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress. https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/) 84

Fig. 6.1 Cover image from Richard Marsh, *An Aristocratic Detective* (Digby, Long, & Co., 1900) by Harold Piffard 108

Fig. 7.1 "Real Ghost Stories: The Spaniards" by E. and H. Heron. *Pearson's Magazine*, Vol. 5, Jan. to June 1898, p. 60 132



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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: The Successors to Sherlock Holmes

At the heart of this book is an absence: a person missing, presumed dead. That person is Sherlock Holmes. In December 1893, a mere six years after his natal appearance, when the great detective had been starring in *The Strand Magazine* for less than two years, at the height of his popularity with the late-Victorian reading public, his creator Arthur Conan Doyle killed him. In "The Final Problem," Sherlock disappeared over the Reichenbach Falls in a struggle with master-criminal Professor Moriarty (never previously mentioned in a Holmes story), and both were swallowed up by a "dreadful caldron of swirling water and seething foam" (Doyle, "Final" 570). If the full-page Sidney Paget illustration facing the story's opening page (Fig. 1.1), depicting Holmes in a tussle with another man and seemingly about to topple off the side of the waterfall, left readers in some doubt about the detective's fate, the legend emblazoned beneath did not: "The Death of Sherlock Holmes," it trumpeted (Doyle, "Final" 558). At the time of the story's composition and publication, Doyle firmly believed that his creation was dead and that this would be the last of Holmes. He considered his detective fiction a "lower stratum of literary achievement," and felt that with Holmes out of the way he could capitalise on his literary celebrity and attract an audience for what he termed his "highest … conscientious, respectable" work, his long historical novels (*Memories* 84; Stashower, Lellenberg, and Foley 301). Authors, it seems, are not always the best arbiters of their own work.

Indeed, seven years later, provoked by the wild success of William Gillette's stage adaptation *Sherlock Holmes*, which was touring in the United

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States, Doyle, ever the savvy businessman, had second thoughts and decided to resurrect Holmes. He pitched the novel *The Hound of the Baskervilles* to the editors of the *Strand*. It went on to be serialised in the magazine from 1901 to 1902 and set in motion the rekindling of the relationship between Doyle, Holmes, and the *Strand* which would last for almost another 30 years. The final Holmes story, "Shoscombe Old Place" was published by the *Strand* in April 1927. But this book is concerned with the years when Sherlock Holmes was dead. With the successors who took his place.

* * *

As Stephen Knight reminds us, "The vast majority of detective, and indeed crime, stories written in the nineteenth century did not appear in book form, but in the pages of elusive magazines and regularly appearing newspapers. This the sea in which the detectives are born and first swim" (Knight, *Art of Murder* 11). Indeed, the Victorian *fin-de-siècle* was truly the age of the periodical press. The expensive and bulky triple-decker novel was dying; by 1897, the number of three-volume novels published annually in Britain had fallen to four (Keating 26). Publishing costs were dropping as taxes on paper and advertising were repealed, at the same time as paper production and printing technology advanced. The abolition of taxation on newspapers also led to the "rapid development of provincial journalism," with provincial newspapers outnumbering and outselling London publications from the mid-nineteenth century until the 1950s; these provincial weekly newspapers combined local news with features borrowed from the new journalism of the London press, including competitions, London letters, and syndicated serial fiction (Qtd. in Hobbs 4). Typesetting, which at the start of the nineteenth century had been done by hand, was revolutionised by the invention of the linotype machine, allowing multiple lines of text to be run at once. The commercialisation of half-tone technology as a means of producing low-cost, high-quality illustrations meant that photographs and drawings could be incorporated with basic linotype printing. Growing train networks also enabled fast and wide distribution of print material. Over 800 W. H. Smith railway bookstalls were established in the second half of the nineteenth century, meaning that the middle-class commuter could not only buy good quality reading material for their journey but could even borrow it at one station and return it at another.

Perhaps most importantly of all, Forster's 1870 Education Act made elementary education compulsory for those between the ages of five and twelve in England and Wales, as well as setting up board schools for the

children of the working classes for the first time. Literacy rates rose and, by the time the first generation of children to benefit from the Act became adults in the late 1880s, new forms of cheap ephemeral media and genres of popular fiction were springing up to cater for their reading tastes and preferences. Periodicals and cheap provincial newspapers were born of this combination of social change and new technology and catered to this new mass literate reading public. By 1900 there were over 50,000 periodicals in circulation in Britain and the colonies; magazines and newspapers catering to every taste and budget: from cheap weekly penny papers to six-shilling deluxe monthly magazines. As the president of the newly formed Society of Authors, Walter Besant, described in *The Pen and the Book* (1899), his guidebook for aspiring authors, this development presented boundless opportunities for writers and publishers:

> there are at this moment in the country hundreds of papers and journals and magazines, weekly and monthly … The circulation of some is enormous, far beyond the wildest dreams of twenty years ago: they are the favourite reading of millions who until the last few years never read anything: they are the outcome of the School Board, which pours out every year by thousands, by the hundred thousand, boys and girls into whom they have instilled … a love of reading. (54–55)

It was not in novels, but in short stories published in weekly or monthly magazines or newspapers catering to this newly literate mass readership that most Victorian fictional detectives were born, conferring immense popularity on the publications in which they appeared. Following the publication of the first Sherlock Holmes short story in July 1891, the magazine's already impressive sales figures soon boomed at well over 500,000 copies per issue (Brake and Demoor 604). After Holmes disappeared over the Reichenbach Falls, apparently never to return, the *Strand* and other newspapers and magazines became desperate to retain or capture the readers who had become addicted to Doyle's serialised detective fiction. As John Sutherland has noted, as a reaction to the success of Sherlock Holmes stories for the *Strand*, "by the mid-1890s, it has been estimated that of the 800 weekly papers in Britain, 240 were carrying some variety of detective story" (181). As a clerk at a W. H. Smith's bookstall explained, when he was interviewed by *The Speaker* in 1893 about the public's reading habits: "He would not undertake to phrophesy the success of any book outside the limits of detective fiction. Any detective story, whatever its merits might be, he could sell from morning to night" ("A Literary Causerie" 383).

Holmes rivals, clones, parodies, and inversions began to fill up the pages of countless family magazines such as the *Windsor*, the *Ludgate*, *Pearson's*, and in the *Strand* itself, as well as provincial newspapers, for the rest of the century. A vast (and largely uncharted) treasure trove of detective stories was published in periodicals, newspapers, and magazines in the years 1893–1900. Many of these works have been unknown, undiscovered, or inaccessible, owing to the nature of their ephemeral modes of publication. Victorian newspapers and periodicals were until recently only available to those who had the time and wherewithal to visit the British Library's Colindale depository and to sift through catalogues, boxes, and microfiche in order to access frail copies of magazines and papers, whose pages were filled with multiple columns of tiny print. In the 1970s, many decades before newspaper and periodical digitisation, Hugh Greene trawled the archives to produce four fine anthologies of lesser-known Victorian detective fiction for Penguin, which unearthed many of these forgotten "successors to Sherlock Holmes." In successive years, similar edited anthologies such as Douglas Greene's *Detection by Gaslight* (1997); Alan K. Russell's *Rivals of Sherlock Holmes* (1993); Michael Cox's *The Oxford Book of Victorian Detective Stories* (2002); Michael Sims's *The Penguin Book of Gaslit Crime* (2009), *The Penguin Book of Victorian Women in Crime* (2011), and *The Dead Witness: A Connoisseur's Collection of Victorian Detective Stories* (2011); Nick Rennison's *The Rivals of Sherlock Holmes* (2008), *Supernatural Sherlocks* (2017), and *More Rivals of Sherlock Holmes* (2019), all built upon Greene's work, concentrating on collecting stories from well-known nineteenth-century authors such as Edgar Allan Poe, Wilkie Collins, and Mary Elizabeth Braddon, alongside less well-known writers such as Headon Hill, Arthur Morrison, and L.T. Meade.

However, as Anne Humpherys' and Andrew Radford's surveys of scholarship on the crime genre—completed in 1998 and 2008, respectively—both noted, critical work on Victorian detective fiction was slower and more resistant to include these lesser-known and difficult-to-access works, which, until the early 2000s at least, were still being mostly overlooked by scholars "in favour of an obsessive return of critical analysis to a handful of canonised texts by three male writers—Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, and Arthur Conan Doyle" (259). In *The Art of Murder* (1998) Stephen Knight also argued that the notion of the crime genre being rooted in a small number of canonical texts by Poe and Doyle was more than somewhat problematic. For Knight, the fact that so many crime and detective stories appeared in the pages of periodicals and magazines meant that the genre did not have "so simple or so gratifying a genealogy … as

the classic account suggests" (*The Art of Murder* 11). Indeed, this type of limited genealogy of genre is notable in a number of otherwise valuable critical histories of crime fiction such as Ian Ousby's *Bloodhounds of Heaven* (1976), Peter Thoms's *Detection and Its Designs: Narrative and Power in Nineteenth-Century Detective Fiction* (1998), and Lawrence Frank's *Victorian Detective Fiction and the Nature of Evidence* (2003).

Thankfully, processes of Victorian newspaper and magazine digitisation by the British Library, Gale-Cengage, and the British Newspaper Archive have recently begun to make access to these stories much easier. We can now begin to search for and identify the detective serials in those 240 weekly papers carrying detective stories, mentioned by Sutherland, amongst other things. And by doing this, we can undertake the important work of developing a broader and more inclusive picture of nineteenth-century detective fiction—one that goes beyond traditional canonical boundaries and recuperates popular yet virtually unknown writers and stories. This book hopes to build upon a body of scholarship appearing in the last ten years or so which has helped to uncover and illuminate such works of Victorian detective fiction. As such, this study is a companion piece to my monograph *Late Victorian Crime Fiction in the Shadows of Sherlock* (2014). In it, I examined crime fiction from the years 1886 to 1900, a formative and fascinating period in the history of the genre, which has been termed the "First Golden Age of Detective Fiction" (Smith, *Golden* iii). That book investigated representations of detectives and criminals in both canonical and forgotten crime fiction at this key juncture, challenging studies of the development of the genre which had awarded undue prominence to a handful of figures—usually Poe, Dickens, Collins, and Doyle. My study built upon the work of scholars such as Joseph Kestner (2003), Maurizio Ascari (2007), Lee Horsley (2010), Caroline Reitz (2004), Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee (2003), Christopher Pittard (2007, 2008, 2011), Lucy Sussex (2010), Srdjan Smajić (2010), and Michael Cook (2014), who either began and or continue the critical work of offering an alternative, and much fuller, account of late-Victorian crime fiction. *Late Victorian Crime Fiction in the Shadows of Sherlock* concentrated particularly on the frequently overlooked stories which blurred the boundaries between genres and illustrated the burgeoning nineteenth-century detective genre's often overlooked capacity for narrative and moral complexity. *Late Victorian Crime Fiction in the Shadows of Sherlock* examined a selection of crime stories where detectives are criminals and murderers, where criminals are heroes, or where crimes go unsolved, arguing that such "shadows of Sherlock" demonstrated the need to reconsider the

"cosy" reputation of the Victorian detective genre. That book closed by reflecting, "There is much more work to be done in this area…The need remains for further processes of re-evaluation, consolidation, and recuperation which this study has begun, with potentially hundreds more valuable 'Shadows of Sherlock' as yet undetected" (Clarke 183).

At the time, I did not foresee that I would immediately begin to undertake that work. However, in my time investigating Sherlock and his contemporaries, I had discovered dozens of fascinating detective series, all of which were published in periodicals and newspapers in the years when Sherlock was dead, and about which little was known, but which did not necessarily showcase the late-Victorian detective genre's capacity for moral ambiguity in the way that the stars of *Shadows of Sherlock* did. I decided that, as a companion piece to *Late Victorian Crime Fiction in the Shadows of Sherlock,* I wanted to bring to light and explore few of the most interesting of those other successors to Sherlock Holmes. I don't seek to make any claims about this group of stories as an ideologically or formally coherent body of work; I am interested in examining how they showcase the ways in which writers, the magazine market, and the detective genre responded to Sherlock's death.

So, in *British Detective Fiction, 1891–1901: The Successors to Sherlock Holmes*, I explore a number of short-story series by six popular but little-studied, although increasingly commonly anthologised, authors whose collections of stories illuminate the breadth and diversity of the popular late-Victorian detective series in the years following Holmes's demise. Each chapter details the publication history and contemporary reception of one or more collections of detective short stories, published in periodical or newspaper form, during the years that Holmes was dead. This study demonstrates that insight into generic variety and development can more often be found not in the canonical texts and authors of Victorian detection, but in those published in periodicals and provincial newspapers and hence since (mostly) relegated to the forgotten fringes of the genre. This book is not a survey listing and describing all the works that clamoured to fill the void left by Holmes's death. That mammoth task has already been at least partially attempted by others such as LeRoy Lad Panek in *After Sherlock Holmes: The Evolution of the British and American Detective Stories, 1891–1914* (2014) and Stephen Knight in *Towards Sherlock Holmes: A Thematic History of Crime Fiction in the 19th Century World* (2017). These recent works take an international approach to the evolution of the detective genre in which they consider the role of British, American, and

Australian writers in the development of the nineteenth-century detective genre both before and after Holmes. They are broad and brisk surveys which help us to understand the big picture of the detective genre's worldwide development over the course of the nineteenth century. This book, by contrast, employs a case study format to focus upon six of the most popular and renowned authors whose works appeared in the narrow window between December 1893, when Holmes died, and 1901, when he was resurrected again in the pages of the *Strand*.

In "The Slaughterhouse of Literature" (2000), his pioneering work on non-canonical Victorian detective fiction, Franco Moretti noted that at times when genres are coming into being, no one knows what will work and what will not. Rules and codifications for genres tend to be retrospectively applied, and those stories which do not fit these later narrow definitions are often overlooked or dismissed as inferior or improper versions of that genre. Here, I focus upon such stories—stories which were being written at a time of great upheaval and innovation for the detective genre, a time when no one was certain what the rules were but were desperate to capitalise upon the gap in the market left by the sudden demise of Sherlock Holmes. As a result, most of these stories exist on the borderline of genre—they overlap with the colonial adventure tale, the ghost story, gothic fiction, and the slum novel, among other things. They showcase various incarnations of the figure of the detective, working with varying degrees of success or failure. In the pages of this study, readers will be introduced to all sorts of fascinating late-Victorian detectives—professional, amateur, male, female, old, young. There's a gypsy pawn shop worker, a forensic scientist, a New Woman detective, a British aristocrat, a ghost-hunter, and an East-End criminal who has carved out a role as one of London's top private detectives, amongst others. In some cases, the detectives work with the police, in others they are intellectual amateurs intrigued by unsolved puzzles, in others again they are criminals themselves, out to defraud their trusting clients. They feature a variety of crimes that still resonate today—from robbery and murder to blackmail, bigamy, sexual assault, stolen identity, and terrorist attack.

If we are truly to understand the diversity of the detective story at the *fin-de-siècle,* we cannot study only those already-canonised stories which shore up dominant yet limited and prescriptive views of the genre at that time, as cosy and conservative, obsessed with masculine and scientific authority and formal resolution. Rather, if we explore the types of stories that enjoyed widespread circulation or great popularity, but which did not

conform to later-decided rules of the genre and hence disappeared into the dustbin of history, we attain greater insight into the flexibility and permeability of what the post-Sherlock *fin-de-siècle* detective narrative could be and do.

Each chapter of this study seeks to illuminate a different publication and a different author, assessing their contributions to the late-Victorian detective genre in the post-Holmes era. Chapter 2 begins by focusing upon a sample of the detective fiction by the hugely prolific Irish writer Mrs L[ouise] T[homasina] Meade. After Doyle, Meade was the *Strand*'s most-published author of crime stories and she was his immediate replacement in the magazine. In the period 1893–1903, Meade published six detective series in the *Strand* magazine alone and spoke frankly about her business-like approach of "writing to order." I present Meade as a consummate and canny woman-of-letters who changed genre from children's fiction to detective stories when the marketplace dictated it after Holmes's death. By examining her "Stories from the Diary of a Doctor" (1893–95) and "The Brotherhood of Seven Kings" (1898), both published in the *Strand* at the time of Holmes's absence, I demonstrate Meade's market acuity and ability to initiate, borrow from, and blend existing popular tropes and trends, such as the dangerous colonial woman, the scientific detective, and the figure of the master criminal who had become popular following Moriarty's appearance in "The Final Problem," in such a way as to satisfy the mostly male, mostly British *Strand* readers to whom she was most likely personally and politically opposed.

Chapter 3 examines C[atherine] L[ouisa] Pirkis's *The Experiences of Loveday Brooke, Lady Detective*, first published in the *Ludgate Magazine* in 1893–94, one of few series which contemporary reviewers found to be on a par with Doyle's work; as the *Speaker* put it, "the lamented Sherlock Holmes has bequeathed us a number of successors, of the majority of whom it may be safely averred that they are unworthy to brush their great exemplar's boots. But in that majority we shall certainly not include the beautiful and accomplished 'Loveday Brooke, Lady Detective'" ("Fiction"). Pirkis's series is only the second work of Victorian detective fiction by a female author and featuring a female detective—the first, discovered by Adrienne Gavin, is Mrs George [Elizabeth Bourgoyne] Corbett's *Behind the Veil; or Revelations by a Lady Detective*, starring detective Dora Bell, which was published weekly in the newspaper the *Leicester Chronicle* in 1891. This chapter focuses on Loveday Brooke's appearance in the *Ludgate,* exploring the ways in which this magazine was